How the RTP questioning process works. The following discussions are much longer than is typical. What is done is to include several questioning techniques to show the various ways of dealing with students. In a school that has been using RTP for some time, working with students generally goes much more quickly. The reason for this is that students become familiar with the questioning process; rarely do they offer excuses. Instead, they focus on solving their problems.

The following discussions involve two students. The first student, whom we'll call Christian, has just hit another student, Brandt, in the face while they were playing basketball. Christian refuses to leave the playground and to go to the RTC. An administrator is called to the scene.

Administrator: Christian, you'll need to come with me to my office.   
Christian: (No response.)

Administrator: Christian, if you don't come with me, what do you think will happen? (Remember to always ask questions in a calm, relaxed manner.)   
Christian: (No response.)

Administrator: Christian, we'll have to call your parents, and if they can't be located or refuse to come, then we'll have to call the police. Is that what you want?   
Christian: I don't care.

Administrator: Do you think not caring and our having to call your parents will make things better or worse for you?

(The main goal of the administrator is to get the child to commit to leaving the playground or classroom, wherever they're refusing to leave. At this point in time, the administrator leaves the teacher in charge and goes to call the parents or the police. As he leaves, he says, "I see you've chosen to have me call your parents or the police." Because the custom of the school has been firmly established, the student believes the administrator. The student is still in control, and his decisions are being respected. Most students will go with the administrator at that time. If they don't, then the parents are called. If the administrator backs down, the integrity of the program has been seriously compromised.

Christian is still mad and upset, but follows the administrator to the office without saying anything.)

Administrator (in his office with Christian): Christian, I see you're upset. Do you want to work at solving your problem now, or do you want to go to the RTC to calm down, and we can talk later? (Usually, most students will begin to tell the administrator what happened.)   
Christian: He hit me first. And he's been making fun of me.

Administrator: Who hit you and teased you?   
Christian: Brandt.

Administrator: Then what did you do?   
Christian: I hit him back. My Dad told me I could defend myself if someone hit me. (I never criticize what parents have been reported as saying, rather I keep the student focused on the rules of where he is, namely in school.)

Administrator: What's the rule about hitting people here at school?   
Christian: You're not allowed to hit others, and you're supposed to keep your hands and feet to yourself. But he hit me first. What's going to happen to him?

Administrator: Well, I'll talk with Brandt next. But Christian, who is it you can control? (Many times students will divert attention to the other party involved. Remember, always keep them focused on who they control.)   
Christian: Me.

Administrator: Then who is responsible for what you do?   
Christian: I am.

Administrator: What happens when you hit someone at school?   
Christian: I get in trouble.

Administrator: What do you mean, get in trouble? (I'm trying to get Christian to think in specific terms.)   
Christian: I have to go to the RTC, and I could be suspended from school.

Administrator: Is that what you want?   
Christian: No, but what do I do? Whenever I play basketball, he laughs at me when I miss a shot and tells my teammates that they're stupid for picking me to be on their team.

Administrator: Do you think that hitting Brandt will stop him from teasing and hitting you?   
Christian: No.

Administrator: When you hit other students, do you get into trouble?   
Christian: Yes.

Administrator: Is that what you want?   
Christian: No.

Administrator: What are you going to do the next time Brandt teases or hits you?   
Christian: I don't know.

Administrator: Do you want to continue to get into trouble?   
Christian: No. But what about Brandt?

Administrator: With whom am I talking right now? (Many key questions have to be repeated, often with different phrasing, to assure that the student stays focused on the person over whom he has control, himself.)   
Christian: Me.

Administrator: Are you willing to take responsibility for what you do and solve your problem?   
Christian: I guess so.

Administrator (suspecting a weak commitment): Are you serious about this or not?   
Christian: Yes.

Administrator: What are you going to do the next time Brandt teases and hits you?   
Christian: I really don't know. Nothing seems to work.

Administrator: If I showed you a way to solve your problem and not get into trouble, would you be interested?   
Christian: Yes.

Administrator: OK, what I'd like you to do is go to the RTC and work on a plan. Ms. Johnson is there if you need help. Meanwhile, I'm going to talk with Brandt. When I finish talking to Brandt, I'll bring both of you together and help you and Brandt work out a solution to your problem so that both of you don't continue to get into trouble. Christian, how does that sound?   
Christian: OK.

(The administrator takes Christian to the RTC, where he can work with Nola Johnson, the RTC teacher. She will help him write a plan which should include how he is going to deal with the same or similar problem the next time it occurs. Meanwhile, Brandt is called in by the administrator, who will talk with him to find out what his perception of the problem is, and whether he is willing to resolve his conflict with Christian.)

Administrator: Brandt, what happened between you and Christian on the playground?   
Brandt: We were playing basketball, and Christian told me to shut up, and then he pushed me.

Administrator: What were you saying to Christian when he told you to shut up?   
Brandt: Nothing, I didn't do anything to him.

Administrator: What would Christian say you were doing?   
Brandt: I don't know, he usually lies anyway.

Administrator: Christian said you were teasing him and making fun of him. He said that every time he missed a shot, you laughed and told the other players that they were stupid for having him on their team.   
Brandt: Christian will say anything not to get into trouble.

Administrator: What would you think the other players on the teams would say?   
Brandt: I don't know.

Administrator: Brandt, do you want to work at solving this problem or not? (If the student continues to deny any wrongdoing, then I send him to the RTC, since he is choosing not to work with me, and I call in witnesses to the incident to determine what has happened.)   
Brandt: I was just playing around, and besides, that's no reason for him to hit me.

Administrator: What does playing around mean? (Again, I try to get the student to be specific; "playing around" doesn't say what he was doing.)   
Brandt: I was just teasing him about missing so many shots. Then he said shut up and pushed me.

Administrator: After he said shut up and pushed you, then what did you do?   
Brandt: I told him to stop pushing me, and he laughed at me, so I pushed him back.

Administrator: Is pushing and teasing allowed at school?   
Brandt: No, but he pushed me first.

Administrator: Is pushing and teasing allowed at school? (When they answer the question but include an excuse, you ask the question again.)   
Brandt: No.

Administrator: So, what happened when you pushed him back?   
Brandt: He hit me in the face.

Administrator: Then what happened?   
Brandt: The teacher came over and asked him what he just did. He wouldn't answer, so they called you

Administrator: Do you think pushing Christian back helped solve the problem?   
Brandt: No. But what could I do? He pushed me first. And besides, he pushes me every time we play basketball.

Administrator: Did you tell the teacher on duty about the problem?   
Brandt: No, because she would just tell me to stay away from him, and then I wouldn't be able to play basketball if Christian was playing.

Administrator: What else can you do to solve the problem?   
Brandt (showing frustration): I don't know.

Administrator: Well, did pushing him make things better or worse for you?   
Brandt: Worse, he hit me in the face.

Administrator: Do you think that both of you will be allowed to play basketball if you continue teasing, pushing, and hitting each other?

Brandt: No. I'll leave him alone if he leaves me alone! (Any time a student uses the actions of another as a reason for what he does, then his move toward lack of responsibility has to be addressed.)

Administrator: Who controls what you do, you or Christian? (I refocus him on who is responsible for his actions.)   
Brandt: I do.

Administrator: Would you like to find a way to solve the problem between you and Christian, so that you will be able to continue to play basketball during recess?   
Brandt: Yes, if he will stop pushing and hitting me. (Brandt was making his future actions contingent on what Christian did, which is avoiding responsibility.)

Administrator: Would you like to find a way to solve the problem? (The key here is that if an excuse for actions is given, and the question really isn't answered, then you ask it again.)   
Brandt: I guess. (Never accept a weak commitment from a student.)

Administrator: Are you really serious about wanting to work things out so that you can continue to play basketball?   
Brandt: Yes, I just want to play basketball.

Administrator: Should we bring Christian in to see if the two of you can solve this problem?   
Brandt: I don't care. (Again, a weak commitment.)

Administrator: Do you really want to solve this problem or not?   
Brandt: I guess I do. (Still another weak commitment.)

Administrator: How will you solve the conflict if the two of you don't resolve your differences?   
Brandt: I don't know.

Administrator: Should we bring Christian in so that you two can work together to solve your conflict?   
Brandt: Will you be here? (Obviously, he wanted outside support for solving his problem.)

Administrator: Yes, I will be here.   
Brandt: OK.

(Christian, who meantime has been working on a plan in the RTC is brought to the administrator's office to learn to negotiate with Brandt on how to resolve their conflict. As the students are guided through the negotiation process, they begin to learn how to resolve their differences both in and out of school. It must always be remembered that you never allow students to begin negotiations until they are calm and settled sufficiently to work things out, and they are committed to re-solving their problem.

Some schools insist that students work things out on their own. At first, it is recommended that someone who is familiar with the strategies of the process assist the students so that they learn the necessary techniques. This will prepare them for future differences or conflicts by giving them the skills and confidence to work out problems on their own.

Christian has brought the plan he had been working on with the RTC teacher. Have the students bring their plans with them, provided the plans have been completed.)

Administrator: Brandt, are you willing to work at solving the problem between you and Christian? (Testing the commitment of the student.)   
Brandt: Yes, if he is. (Again, the student is trying to make what he does contingent upon what the other student does.)

Administrator: Brandt, who do you control?   
Brandt: Me.   
Administrator: Brandt, are you willing to work at solving the problem between you and Christian? (Repeating the above question to test for commitment.)   
Brandt: Yes.

Administrator: Christian, how about you? Are you willing to work at solving the problem between you and Brandt?   
Christian: I just want him to stay away from me. (Again, a contingent commitment, thus the question must be repeated.)

Administrator: Christian, are you willing to work at solving the problem between you and Brandt?   
Christian: Yes.   
Administrator: Brandt, what can you do to solve this problem?   
Brandt: I can stop teasing Christian and making fun of him when we play basketball.

Administrator: Is that the only time you tease him?   
Brandt: No, sometimes I tease him during class or when we are eating in the cafeteria.

Administrator: So, how can you help solve this problem?   
Brandt: I guess I can stop teasing him wherever we are. (Whenever the student uses words like "I guess," that is a red flag, a sign of a weak commitment.)

Administrator: Brandt, are you really serious about this or not?   
Brandt: Yes.   
Administrator: Do you agree to stop teasing Christian and making fun of him?   
Brandt: Yes.

Administrator: Christian, Brandt has agreed to stop teasing you. Will that help solve the problem?   
Christian: He hit me, too.   
Brandt: I didn't hit you.

Administrator: What are you two doing right now?   
Christian: Arguing.

Administrator: Is arguing going to help solve the problem?   
Brandt (looking at the floor): No, I guess not.   
Christian: No.

Administrator: Christian, when you say that Brandt hit you, what do you mean?   
Christian: He pushed me in the back.   
Administrator: Brandt, are you willing to stop teasing and pushing Christian?   
Brandt: Yes, if he'll stop pushing me.

Administrator: Brandt, who is it you control?   
Brandt: Me.

Administrator: Brandt, are you willing to stop teasing and pushing Christian? (Remember to always keep the students focused on what they control and are willing to do, regardless of what others do.)   
Brandt: Yes.

Administrator: Christian, if Brandt stops teasing and pushing you, will this help solve the problem?   
Christian: Yes.

Administrator: Christian, what are you willing to do to help solve the problem between you and Brandt?   
Christian: If he'll stop teasing and pushing me, I won't push or hit him.

Administrator: Can you control what Brandt does?   
Christian: No.

Administrator: Who is it you control, and who am I talking with right now? (Again, when students try to avoid taking responsibility for their actions, you must focus them on the issue at hand until they are willing to commit to working on what they can do, regardle!ss of what others do.)   
Christian: Me.

Administrator: So, what are you willing to do to help solve the problem between you and Brandt?   
Christian: I won't push or hit him.

Administrator: Are you really serious about this?   
Christian: Yes.

Administrator: So, what will you do the next time someone teases or makes fun of you?   
Christian: I'll walk away.

Administrator: Can you really do that?   
Christian: Yes.

Administrator: If that doesn't work, and the student continues to bother you, what will you do then?   
Christian: I'll tell the teacher.

Administrator: Brandt, what is your plan if Christian or someone else pushes or hits you?   
Brandt: I'll tell the teacher.

Administrator: What do you think of Christian's idea of walking away?   
Brandt: If they push me, I could walk away, but if they hit me, I don't think I could just walk away.

Administrator: Then what are you going to do if they hit you?   
Brandt: I would probably try to hit them back.

Administrator: What happens when you hit someone at school, whatever the reason?   
Brandt: You get sent to the RTC, and you could be suspended from school.

Administrator: Is that what you'd want?   
Brandt: No.

Administrator: Does hitting someone back usually make things better or worse?   
Brandt: Worse.

Administrator: So, what could you do if someone hit you?   
Brandt: I could tell them I don't want to get suspended from school and walk away.

Administrator: Do you think that would work?   
Brandt: I can try it.

Administrator: What if either of you were really angry, and you were having a hard time calming down, what could you do?   
Christian and Brandt: I don't know.

Administrator: We have one student who loses his temper a lot. He solves that problem by going to the RTC and timing himself out until he calms down. What do you think of that idea?   
Brandt: I like that. My friend, Nelson, does that now. He goes to the RTC every time he's ready to explode.

Administrator: What about you, Christian? Do you think you can do that when you get angry?   
Christian: Yeah, I can try it.

Administrator: After you've calmed down in the RTC, what could you do?   
Christian: I don't know.

Brandt: Go back to where we came from.   
Administrator: Christian, would that work for you?   
Christian: Yes.

Administrator: After you've calmed down, what could you do if you still had a problem with someone else?   
Brandt: I don't know.

Administrator: What are we doing right now?   
Christian: We're working our problems out with you.   
Administrator: Is that something you could do if you have a problem in the future?   
Brandt: Yeah.

Administrator: Christian, how about you?   
Christian: Yes, I could do that.   
(At this point, the administrator summarizes what has been agreed to by the two boys.)

Administrator: Let me see if I understand what both of you have agreed to. Brandt, you are agreeing to stop teasing and pushing Christian, is that correct?   
Brandt: Yes.

Administrator: Christian, you're agreeing to stop pushing and hitting Brandt, is that correct?   
Christian: Yes.

Administrator: Both of you also agreed to walk away or tell a teacher if you have problems in the future. Is that right?   
Christian and Brandt: Yes.

Administrator: You also agreed to time yourself out in the RTC when you get really angry, is that correct?   
Brandt: Yes.

Administrator: Christian, how about you? (Always make sure you get responses to your questions.)   
Christian: Yes, I agree.

Administrator: Are you willing to put your agreement in writing and sign it? (Again, testing their commitment.)   
Christian: Yes, I am.   
Brandt: Me, too.

Administrator: What do you think should happen to the person who breaks this agreement? (At this time, the administrator begins to fill out a conflict resolution form.)   
Brandt: He has to report to the RTC.   
Christian: And he could get suspended from school.

Administrator: To whom will you report any violation of this agreement?   
Christian: To the teacher.   
Brandt: To you, because you've helped us.

(The administrator completes the conflict resolution form, making sure to include everything to which the students have agreed. The students then sign the form, confirming their commitment to their agreement.

Brandt goes to the RTC to begin working on his plan. She is given a copy of the agreement so that it can be used during the planning process. This agreement will also be included in the student's discipline record.

Christian stays with the administrator, who goes over the plan previously completed in the RTC. The administrator will work with Christian and review his plan, helping him to revise his plan where necessary, and making sure that all points are covered from the discussion with Brandt.)

Once their agreement is signed and their individual plans are completed and approved by the administrator, he can then discuss privately the consequences of each student's previous actions.

When consequences are discussed, the following points should be considered:   
1. Did the student take responsibility for his actions?   
2. Did the student willingly work to solve his problem?   
3. How serious are the actions? (For example, teasing and pushing versus hitting or physical assault.)   
4. The disciplinary history of each student.   
5. District and school guidelines for specific student actions.

Throughout the questioning process, you will notice that regardless of how the students acted, the administrator kept the problem from escalating by never threatening, always asking questions in a calm, relaxed manner, and letting the students determine when they were ready to resolve the problem. He also had the students use the rules and expectations of the school as guidelines for evaluating how successful they were in controlling their own perceptions without disturbing others. This was evident each time the administrator asked "What's the rule?" and "What happens when you break the rule?"

Also, notice how the administrator continually respected the students' decisions and never criticized or threatened them or gave them advice. He always asked what the student wanted to do, and if what he was doing was working. He kept the students focused on the problem and never allowed them to digress into blaming others or trying to excuse what happened.

In following this process, the administrator should not be perceived as a disturbance or part of the students' problem, but rather as a caring person who is trying to help them. Brandt asked the administrator "Will you be there?" It was evident that he perceived the administrator as someone who was helping him work through the problem, and not as someone who was there to judge and punish him. When you are not trying to control students' actions, you are less likely to be perceived as a disturbance. Remember, disturbances are those things that get in the way of what we are trying to accomplish.

Often, you see the students struggle as they go through the questioning process, but that struggle is necessary if they are to learn to deal with their conflicts with any degree of skill and self-confidence. The administrator who makes all the decisions for the students never allows that struggle to take place, thus the students have little chance of developing that confidence on their own. They might also perceive the administrator as part of their problem, rather than as someone who teaches them how to find the solution. It is necessary to allow students adequate time to struggle through the process. It is that personal struggle, supported by a caring, patient person that is critical to their developing self-confidence.

As students resolve conflicts, they develop the confidence needed to deal successfully with their own problems. This is why it is so important to introduce the negotiating process to students. They learn to use it in future difficulties and not to depend on someone else to mediate their problems. It is not uncommon to find students breaking up fights and arguments on their own several months after RTP has been introduced. When students can't solve their problems on their own, instead of fighting they ask for assistance.

During the questioning process, notice how the students changed their style of dealing with their conflict from the usual blaming and making excuses to focusing on resolving their problem. This is what happens when students learn this process. Also, without dealing with excuses, the problem solving time is reduced considerably. Even though it might seem to take a little more time at the beginning to help them deal with their conflict, the time is well spent.

What do you do with students who are unwilling to settle their differences? You simply ask them whether they will be able to stay away from each other until they can resolve their conflict. If they agree, you fill in their names on the conflict resolution form, where it states: "These students were unable to resolve their conflict. However, they agree to stay away from each other until they are able to solve their problems." Also, you fill in the consequences section, stating what happens when the agreement is violated.

If the students do not resolve their differences and are unwilling to stay away from each other, they return to the RTC. Once they develop an acceptable plan of action that will assure their conflict will not continue, they may return to class. When given this alternative, most students decide to find a way to resolve their differences or agree to stay away from each other. Remember, you never try to force students to resolve their disagreements. Only they can decide when they are ready. You never push on a living control system.

Instead of solving problems for students, RTP teaches them to solve their own problems. Through this process, students not only take responsibility for the problems, but also for the solutions. They are learning a process that will serve them throughout their lives. Isn't that what any discipline program should be about?

Taken from <http://www.responsiblethinking.com/RTP_Students_Fighting.htm>